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Dear Mr Foster,

Thank you for your letters of 30 December and 11 January in reply to my previous correspondence on the issue of hotels being used as contingency asylum accommodation in Scotland.

I note that you refer to a letter of 20 October 2021 informing the Scottish Government of the Home Office decision to procure hotels in Scotland for the purpose of contingency initial accommodation for people seeking asylum. My officials have no record of receipt of this letter, so I would be grateful if you would forward a copy.

I agree with you that the use of contingency accommodation such as hotels needs to end. As I have clearly set out previously, the use of hotels to accommodate people seeking asylum is not appropriate. People should be accommodated within communities and with access to the support and services they need to enable integration from day one of arrival.

I appreciate that there have been particular challenges due to the pandemic which have increased the number of people in asylum accommodation, and I recognise that the Home Office has taken steps to ensure that people are not put at risk of homelessness during the pandemic. This does not negate the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of people waiting for an initial decision on their asylum application, even prior to the pandemic. The consequent backlog in asylum decisions, the quality of decisions and access to appropriate legal advice are significant factors impacting both the availability of accommodation in the asylum estate and people who need to rebuild their lives with some certainty about their future. At the same time, Glasgow has been consistently accommodating Scotland's proportionate share of people living in dispersed asylum accommodation.

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I have repeatedly invited the Home Secretary to engage with the Scottish Government, COSLA and our local authorities on asylum dispersal. I look forward to receiving more detail from you about the outcome of the HOLLGCEX group work and any potential funding to support local authorities, as well as more detail on forthcoming plans for a 'place based' model for asylum. It is essential that any model recognises not only the availability of accommodation but also its suitability, both for those being accommodated and local communities. I encourage your officials to continue engagement with devolved governments and local authorities. This should take place as early as possible, to help shape a system which can ensure people are appropriately supported.

In the meantime, a number of issues have been raised with me which I want to take the opportunity to bring to your attention. Grateful if you could take immediate steps to resolve these where that is possible, and otherwise provide an explanation for why not, as well as assurance that these are being considered as part of any long term plans for the UK asylum system.

- Access to independent legal advice to support people to navigate the asylum system
Significant concerns have been raised that the rapid expansion of contingency accommodation has resulted in people being unable to access independent legal advice because specialist lawyers are not based in these areas and that support is not being provided to enable people to travel to meet with legal advisers.
- Access to support and services
I have received concerns that people living in hotel contingency accommodation are facing issues in accessing appropriate support and services. These include access to mobile phones or digital connectivity, ESOL and other activities, advocacy support, essential toiletries and culturally appropriate food. I would be grateful to learn how the Home Office is ensuring that people are aware of the services they can access and have sufficient support to maintain their health and wellbeing. Assurance that essential devolved services are being appropriately engaged with would also be appreciated.
- Engagement prior to procurement of hotel contingency accommodation
I remain concerned about the lack of engagement and notification to Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities prior to any asylum contingency accommodation procurement. Despite my raising this issue in October, the Home Office has since procured further hotels in Scotland without the courtesy of informing me or adequate advance engagement with COSLA and Scottish local authorities. I am keen that future discussions on a potential 'place-based' system, including funding for local authorities taking dispersal, ensure genuine and effective partnership is built in. It is critical that the Home Office engages with partners in devolved governments and local authorities on any changes that affect them at the earliest opportunity.
- Outcome of the inquiry into the Park Inn incident
Members of the Scottish Parliament and stakeholder groups in Scotland remain concerned that lessons have not been learnt following the tragic incident at the Park Inn in June 2020. In my October letter, I urged the Home Secretary to share the outcomes of any investigation. I would appreciate any update that you can provide.

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I would be happy to discuss asylum dispersal and the UK asylum system further. I am also keen that the four nations meetings on asylum, which previously took place on a regular basis up to 2019, are re-established to enable discussion about issues of common interest across the UK.

I look forward to receiving more information about any further potential changes to the UK asylum system.

Yours sincerely,



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